

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An information providing system comprising:  
a plurality of information sources each having  
5 both an information providing function of providing  
information upon receipt of a request for providing  
information and an index output function of outputting an  
individual index representative of an information group  
capable of being provided by oneself;  
10 a retrieval engine having an index construction  
function of finally receiving at least one individual index  
outputted by the index output function of at least one  
information source to construct a general index  
representative of information group capable of being  
15 provided by at least one information source, and an  
information retrieval function of retrieving information  
upon receipt of a request for retrieving information with  
the general index constructed by the index construction  
function; and  
20 a mediating apparatus intervening between said  
information sources and said retrieval engine adapted for  
receiving a plurality of individual indexes outputted from  
said plurality of information sources to select an  
individual index satisfying a predetermined index selection  
25 condition from among the plurality of individual indexes  
thus received, said mediating apparatus sending the  
selected individual index to said retrieval engine for use

in the index construction function.

2. A mediating apparatus comprising:

an index receiving section for receiving a  
5 plurality of individual indexes outputted by a plurality of  
information sources each having both an information  
providing function of providing information upon receipt of  
a request for providing information and an index output  
function of outputting an individual index representative  
10 of an information group capable of being provided by  
oneself;

an index selection section for selecting an  
individual index satisfying a predetermined index selection  
condition from among the plurality of individual indexes  
15 received by said index receiving section; and

an index sending section for sending the  
individual index selected by said index selection section  
to a retrieval engine for use in an index construction  
function, said retrieval engine having the index  
20 construction function of finally receiving at least one  
individual index outputted by the index output function of  
at least one information source to construct a general  
index representative of information group capable of being  
provided by at least one information source, and an  
25 information retrieval function of retrieving information  
upon receipt of a request for retrieving information with  
the general index constructed by the index construction

function.

3. A mediating apparatus according to claim 2,  
wherein a plurality of said retrieval engines is provided,

5           said mediating apparatus further comprises an  
index selection condition storage section for storing the  
index selection condition in association with said  
retrieval engine upon receipt of a request for registration  
of the index selection condition by said retrieval engine,

10           said index selection section selects an individual  
index satisfying an index selection condition stored in  
said index selection condition storage section, and  
            said index sending section sends the individual  
index selected by said index selection section to a  
15           retrieval engine associated with the index selection  
condition used in selection of the individual index, of the  
plurality of retrieval engines.

4. A mediating apparatus according to claim 2,  
20           wherein said information sources each has, as the index  
output function, a function of receiving a push program  
defining a method of producing and outputting the  
individual index to produce and output the individual index  
in accordance with the method defined by the push program,  
25           and

            said mediating apparatus further comprises a  
program receiving section for receiving the push program,

a program selection section for selecting a push program satisfying a predetermined program selection condition from among the push programs received by said program receiving section, and

5 a program sending section for sending the push program selected by said program selection section to said information source for use in the index output function.

10 5. A mediating apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said mediating apparatus further comprises a program selection condition storage section for storing the program selection condition in association with said information source upon receipt of a request for registration of the program selection condition by said  
15 information source,

said program selection section selects a push program satisfying a program selection condition stored in said program selection condition storage section, and

20 said program sending section sends the push program selected by said program selection section to an information source associated with the program selection condition used in selection of the push program.